

Arizona State Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC)

Meeting of February 18, 2012 – 9:00 AM

Arizona Game and Fish Department, 5000 West Carefree Hwy, Phoenix, AZ

Present:

Bob Jacobs, Mule Deer Foundation
Amber Munig, AZ Game and Fish
Carl Lutch, AZ Game and Fish
Tom Mackin, Williams/Flagstaff HPC
Tom Finley, AZ Game and Fish
Glen Dickens, AZ Antelope Foundation
Mike Sumner, AZ Game and Fish
Ben Brochu, AZ Game and Fish
Shannon Lawrence, AZ Game and Fish

Scott Lerich, National Wild Turkey Federation
Brian Wakeling, AZ Game and Fish
J.W. Harris, AZ Game and Fish Commission
Stephen Williams, Forage Resource Study Group
Dave Daniels, AZ Game and Fish
Amber Hudson, AZ Bowhunters Association
Gail Steiger, Prescott HPC
Reuben Terán, AZ Game and Fish
Ruth Gregory, AZ Game and Fish

Roll Call of HPCs:

Springerville/Alpine – no representative
Show Low – no representative
Winslow – no representative
Williams/Flagstaff – Tom Mackin
Forage Resource Study Group – Stephen Williams
Prescott – Gail Steiger

Southwest – Mike Sumner
Tucson – Ben Brochu
Sierra Vista/Douglas – Glen Dickens
Safford-no representative
Payson Natural Resources Committee-Dave Daniels

The State HPC Chairman, Commissioner Harris, welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. The State HPC Coordinator, Reuben Terán reviewed the agenda. The Commissioner then asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the State HPC meeting of July 23, 2011. There were changes as follows:

On page 5 – 7th paragraph – It should be noted that Stephen Williams' comments were specific to the Chino Grande Ranch situation. On page 7, in the Forage Resource Study Group report, the word “cages” should be removed and add “will continue to” in the report on precipitation monitoring.

The motion was then made, seconded and carried to accept the minutes with the changes.

HPC Program Updates:

Reuben Terán updated the State HPC on activities and accomplishments that have taken place in the past year within his duties as HPC coordinator. The first of these activities included updating and finalizing the HPC Charter, Project Proposal Instruction Manual and Forms, and a guidance document for potential applicants titled 2011 Priorities for Habitat Enhancement and Wildlife Management drafted in coordination with wildlife conservation organizations (WCOs). Program administrative activities included reviewing, consolidating, and organizing all HPC project files on various network and local computers into one master directory, and the development the first HPC project tracking database. Another major accomplishment this year was the complete redesign of the [HPC website](#). The website now includes links to [Project Proposal Forms and Planning Resources](#),

[Meeting Information](#), [HPC Newsletters](#), [Contact Information](#), and all [2011 project proposals](#) submitted. Various guidance documents and project planning resources now available on the website include: cost guidelines for water developments, mule deer habitat guidelines, AGFD fencing guidelines, and a pinyon-juniper field guide to vegetation management practices. Also included are web links to the Department's Comprehensive Game Management Plan (CGMP) and game species management pages, Federal land management planning, the Department's new HabiMap™ Arizona web-based planning tool, the Department's Online Environmental Review Tool, and WCO funding partners' websites. Because project proposal funding is done in coordination with the WCOs, Reuben reiterated the importance of coordinating with the WCOs early on in the planning stages of a project when requesting Special Big Game License Tag (SBGLT) funds.

Commissioner Harris commended the work of the local HPCs and their accomplishments, and reminded the group that project completion reports are essential in keeping information on the web page current. He reiterated that Reuben will be expecting the project completion reports, which are required to be submitted within 30 days of project completion.

It was suggested that the webpage should also have a link to previous project proposals, which would be helpful to potential project proponents, both internal and external. Reuben will look into space requirements and new pages needed to upload previously submitted proposals. As yet there is not a link to other external funding and granting sources. Reuben has come across a document that lists some external funding resources and will post that document to the HPC website. Reuben will also invite the Department's Grants Coordinator Bonita Gibson to present at the summer HPC on various granting opportunities that may be a good fit for HPC projects and the requirements for applying for such grants.

The Chairman again reiterated the importance of project completion reports. It is critical to have this information to maintain the integrity and accountability of the HPC and Special Tag programs. Brian Wakeling said that the program has been audited several times, and all funding is accounted for, but the challenge is demonstrating the results of the projects, which cannot be done without these reports. It was mentioned that a problem with the lack of reporting lies with staff turnover and it was suggested that any outstanding reports due from proponents who are no longer in their positions, that the regional supervisor be notified so that follow up can be accomplished. It was also suggested that any outstanding projects that have not been reported as completed should also be sent to the local HPC chair person.

Tom Finley offered to start following up on Region 3's unreported projects, and Carl Lutch made the same offer for Region 2.

Reuben also introduced a more long-term vision for the HPC program as it relates to GIS mapping and reporting. When fully implemented, this effort should help to integrate the work done through the HPC program to the larger effort of all the Department's habitat restoration efforts. It will also be a valuable way to showcase the program.

2011 HPC Proposals and Special Big Game License Tag Funding:

Reuben explained the project numbering protocol and displayed the spreadsheet that listed all the projects recommended for funding for the 2011 cycle. The Department's internal project review committee provided their recommendations to the WCOs in November 2011, and the funding recommendations were made at the January 28, 2012 meeting between the Department and the WCO funding partners. Each proponent will be receiving written notification about whether or not their project was funded in early March.

Tom Finley gave a brief history of the Boquillas projects. Although no formal access agreement was ever reached with the Navajo Nation, there was only one time the Boquillas was shut down. This year's funding request was for dirt tank maintenance. Since the project was only partially funded, the ranch might not do the work, which could have implications for access. The cost was an issue; however the tanks to be cleaned are huge. During the project funding meeting, Arizona Elk Society suggested the ranch possibly use the contractor they used for the Buck Springs allotment, who would probably do the job less expensively. Tom explained that the Boquillas ranch operators, as well as other livestock operators, don't necessarily want to use outside contractors for the work they can do themselves to their own specifications; contractors that are unfamiliar with a specific tank may inadvertently do irreparable damage to bentonite linings.

Reuben displayed his project tracking document that showed projects that have been funded through the HPC process from 2002–2011. Commissioner Harris remarked that the level of project quality has improved just in the past few years since he's been chairman, and that proponents are getting better all the time at identifying needs and priorities. While costs have gone up dramatically, cost share has also been improving. But sometimes cost share is just not available. Brian mentioned that in this program we fund projects, not dollar amounts. This year there are many more requests for funding than there are available funds, but later in the year, we may be able to juggle money as needed to make a project whole. Development branch also picks up some of the costs on water developments whenever possible.

A motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve the 2011–2012 funded projects list. With the blessing of the State HPC, the list is now official.

Recreational Access in Arizona and Ties to the HPC:

Commissioner Harris reported that some of the same issues as on the Boquillas have been occurring for a long time in southeast Arizona. Anything the Department and sportsmen can do to create goodwill is extremely important in assuring recreational access. Volunteer hours go a long way toward building these relationships. Access issues are becoming more critical and the Commission is looking at this very closely. Commissioner Harris will be reporting to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Commissioners committee on the work the state is doing to retain access. It was suggested that an access nexus in future HPC project proposals could become part of the criteria or at least make the project a higher priority. It was suggested that the HPC project proposal form be modified to specifically capture the access component of a proposed project.

Ben Brochu from Region 5 introduced Shannon Lawrence, new to the Department in a regional position created to coordinate resource management plans. Her position cost shared between the Department and the NRCS.

Stephen Williams noted that coordinated resource management plans are developed according to the Coordinated Resource Management Handbook and Guideline, which currently did not include any direction regarding access. To effectively include access explicitly within the coordinated resource management planning process, Arizona's Coordinated Resource Management Executive Group would need to adopt this within the handbook. This information will be passed along to the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Executive Staff for further consideration on subsequent action.

HabiMap™ Arizona Presentation:

Reuben gave a presentation on the Department's new web-based planning tool called [HabiMap™ Arizona](#). HabiMap™ Arizona provides a visual representation of the Department's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). This is a tool intended for the general public, project proponents and resource planners but does not, nor is it meant to, supersede coordination with the Department.

It was asked if HPC projects will become part of the HabiMap™ Arizona program. Reuben replied it may be possible that a future GIS data layer of projects funded through SBGLT funds would be integrated into HabiMap™ Arizona to further assist in informing project planning efforts. Reuben also stated that creating the GIS data layer for funded projects is going to be a work in progress with huge implications for its use, and feedback on this effort is welcome. Reuben reported that the HabiMap™ Arizona tool has already been presented to the Western Governors Association Wildlife Council, and the Department is currently coordinating with other western states to assist them during the development of their own GIS applications.

Updates from Game Branch:

Brian Wakeling reported that it is the Director's desire that the CGMP be part of the geospatial planning of the Department. The Department is currently working on its Strategic Plan, which will be completed this year, then made available for public input before being approved by the Commission. It is the first tier of the three-tiered planning process; CGMP would be considered part of the second tier, operational planning. The desire is that CGMP be a useful tool, addressing changing circumstances in real-time fashion and making them web-based. The third tier, implantation plans, will identify the Management Focus Areas (MFA) and the specifics of what will be done to accomplish goals.

The Department's Big Game Management Supervisor, Amber Munig, reported that CGMP will be looking at species on a landscape level, with MFA key species identified. Key species will help identify management needs when various species' needs conflict, but MFAs may have several key species. MFAs identified thus far include Unit 10, Units 13A and 13B, Unit 33 (the Catalina Mountains), and Units 1 and 27, specifically in response to the Wallow Fire. The Arizona Deer Association (ADA) is helping to develop the plan for Units 13A and 13B. In Region 6, MFAs are to be determined, but will most likely include Units 22, 23, and 24B. Most MFAs will be Game Management Units at a minimum, because current data is gathered at the unit level. The goal is to incorporate planning for any species, anything that influences management of an area, including watchable wildlife and law enforcement activity. It will be a very valuable tool in planning where best to use dollars on HPC projects.

The CGMP is currently on the Department's website, but is in the process of revision. By mid-March, most species will be on listed on the CGMP website. When the webpage has been revised, Reuben will send the updated CGMP web link the HPC distribution list.

As CGMP is developed, the Department will be asking for external review and feedback.

Special Tag Sales Update – so far:

Wild Sheep Foundation conducted a \$1 million auction this year, at which one of the Arizona Bighorn Sheep tags sold for \$160,000. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation auctioned an Arizona elk tag for \$85,000. The Mule Deer Foundation auctioned an Arizona mule deer tag for \$220,000.

A question was raised this year at the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) auction about whether or not an organization would be able to charge a buyer's premium (WSF recently adopted a 5% charge on state tags). This is often assessed to cover the cost of credit card fees when buyers pay with a card, but WSF planned to set these funds aside for specific conservation programs. The Department's Attorney General's opinion is that it is not permissible at this time. The organization probably most affected by these fees is the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle. Some groups conduct other fund raising (like optics raffles) to cover those costs. When the special tag auctions started years ago, very few, if any, buyers paid with credit card. Brian suggested that WCOs who decide not to accept credit card payments should state their intent in the letters to the Commission when requesting that they be awarded special tags.

Brian benchmarked with other states on their special tag sales. Utah is the only state that raises more total money and they have over 300 special tags. There is also only one state that raises more money/permit than Arizona, and that state only offers <5 tags. Arizona performs well on both gross earnings and average earnings per tag.

Local HPC Reports:

Stephen Williams for Forage Resource Study Group – They monitor precipitation and report quarterly. March to June 2011 was very dry, with only 2–3 inches. Summer precipitation was 11 inches. The Hopi 3 Canyon Ranches (Hart and Clear Creek) have done juniper work and grinding and have received NRCS dollars for fencing. The Flying M and Bar T Bar Ranches have been doing water projects and are now working on a pipeline.

Dave Daniels for Payson Natural Resource Committee – They have been working with Payson and Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts to get NEPA work completed at the allotment level, so when a project comes up, NEPA is done. They recently found out that ranchers are allowed to use heavy equipment to maintain their allotments, even in wilderness areas.

Tom Finley for Prescott HPC – Tom introduced Gail Steiger, Ranch Manager of Spider Ranch. Gail is also a musician and videographer. HPC projects in the Prescott area have been a struggle for years, mainly due to lack of funding because many areas were classified as "limited population management," which created confusion regarding the Department's objective for elk management. This year, these areas were reclassified as "flexible population management" zones that should clarify the Department's intent to continue to manage for the presence of elk. Tom expects that funding through BLM Resource Advisory Committee, NRCS, Landowner Incentive Program, and SBGLTs will reinvigorate the HPC. Chino Grande may still provide hunter access using a web-based permitting process. Law enforcement patrols are still observing a lot of bad behavior there. Commissioner Harris suggested that when access is allowed, it might require a greater law enforcement presence.

Agreements have been reached with the Wagon Bow property owners, as well as the Willow Creek and Anvil Rock ranches, thanks to the LIP and access programs. Thank you for funding the Boquillas and Mingus projects this year. The region also received a \$71,000 RAC grant for a tamarisk project.

Glen Dickens for the Sierra Vista /Douglas HPC – Hats off to the Department participants from Region 5, who are all very focused on assisting through the HPC process. The Region has assisted in identifying their priorities. The local HPC meeting locations rotate to facilitate attendance and have good landowner participation. The Arizona Antelope Foundation (AAF) applied for and was awarded a \$250,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for pronghorn work in the Sky Islands. Eighty-five thousand dollars from this grant have been

allocated for fencing. Ben Brochu remarked that the whole HPC process has been turning heads, including the Malpais Borderland people. There is lots of potential for leveraging money.

Mike Sumner for the Southwest Arizona HPC – Most of the projects have been sheep waters in remote areas, but there has been a great turnout from ADBSS volunteers. Several more water projects are on the horizon. Last week, Jane Hunts Pothole in Unit 43B was jack hammered and sealed. They also worked out an access route for volunteers to save on helicopter costs. The BLM field offices in Phoenix and Yuma are very receptive for water projects, and many site visits are planned and NEPA is in the works.

Ben Brochu for Tucson HPC – The access issue is huge, and we need to get creative to find solutions. There are lots of opportunities to partner with NRCS through coordinated resource management plans. The HPC remains quite active with participation from the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance, various ranchers and federal entities. The Teacup and Tecolote are under way, finishing up with the engineering, and scheduled for completion within the next six months. Three other catchments were completed and work is ongoing with the Forest Service on fire, focusing on the Catalina-Rincon restoration area. Two projects are in the immediate future: Mt. Fagan catchment in Unit 34A, scheduled for February 23–26, 2012 and the Brady Wash project, March 8–11, 2012.

Tom Mackin for the Williams-Flagstaff HPC – Tom reported that the Kaibab National Forest has been submitting projects. Grassland work in the Williams area, south of I-40 took place, and the Forest is managing wildfires this year to allow them to burn on grasslands in conjunction with juniper pushes. This is probably also the trend for the future. Coconino Sportsmen continue to conduct maintenance on the Pat Springs pipeline. Since the project is ongoing, there has been the need for minimal maintenance on 30 drinkers. NRCD also provided funds to install escape ramps for birds and bats as well. The Region 2 Water Maintenance project is in its second of three years. Volunteers visited 75 developments, a dozen of which had not been visited in years. Most of the work was in Unit 6B. The group has trained some volunteers on 8 catchments and the 2012 work season is beginning soon. The group appreciates the recognition from Commission. The HPC process has enabled them to provide materials for repairs and work with the range and wildlife people on Williams Ranger District.

NGO reports:

Bob Jacobs for the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) – MDF set a record for the recent auction of the Arizona mule deer tag, \$220,000. Colorado's went for \$75,000 and Utah's for \$225,000. The MDF event is fast becoming one of the nation's better conservation shows.

Amber Hudson for the Arizona Bowhunters Association (ABA) – ABA is a new participant in the HPC and Commissioner Harris welcomed Amber and thanked ABA for their participation.

Tom Mackin for Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) – The group was instrumental in protecting two wetlands in Unit 7W: Duck Lake and Dry Lake. The project involved dynamiting to provide waterfowl nesting areas. More wetland fencing is upcoming, working with the Kaibab National Forest as a partner. AWF also attended a day on the range with Diablo Trust ranches and checked their wetland exclosures.

Stephen Williams for Arizona Cattle Growers (ACG) – The ACG winter meeting was held in conjunction with their legislator days. Stock operations on the low desert ranches are frustrated with OHV and target shooters on State Trust land, mostly in Region 6, and are trying to organize, working with AGFD. They feel this has become a public safety issue. A coalition may make a presentation at the landowner lessee summer meeting. Tom Finley gave kudos to Chris from the State Land Department for his work in Region 3.

Good of the order:

Glen Dickens expressed congratulations to the Department on the recent antelope capture effort, despite the fact that no animals were captured. He noted the more than dedicated effort of moving the traps twice, a huge undertaking involving about 50 people, including AAF board members. Glen viewed it as a huge learning opportunity for a number of young wildlife professionals. He especially commended Virginia Gouldsbury from Region 3, and the phenomenal skills of the Papillon helicopter pilots.

Commissioner Harris thanked everyone for their participation. He has asked to continue chairing the State HPC. He's passionate about the process and the potential the HPC has for helping to resolve issues like access, as well as create partnerships to make the best use of resources.

2012 HPC Summer Meeting – The meeting will take place on Saturday, June 30, 2012 at the AGFD's Region 1 office in Pinetop, Arizona.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 PM.